Lamentations
איכה
merged
https://www.sefaria.org/Lamentations
This file contains merged sections from the following text versions:
-Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, published by JPS
-https://jps.org/books/tanakh-the-holy-scriptures-blue/

Lamentations

Chapter 1

a Chaps. 1–4 are alphabetical acrostics, i.e., the verses begin with the successive letters of the Heb. alphabet. Chap. 3 is a triple acrostic. In chaps. 2–4 the letter pe precedes the ʻayin. Alas! Lonely sits the city
Once great with people! She that was great among nations Is become like a widow; The princess among states Is become a thrall.
Bitterly she weeps in the night, Her cheek wet with tears. There is none to comfort her Of all her friends. All her allies have betrayed her; They have become her foes.
Judah has gone into exile Because of misery and harsh oppression; When she settled among the nations, She found no rest; All her pursuers overtook her b Meaning of Heb. uncertain. In the narrow places. -b
Zion’s roads are in mourning, Empty of festival pilgrims; All her gates are deserted. Her priests sigh, Her maidens are unhappy— She is utterly disconsolate!
Her enemies are now the masters, Her foes are at ease, Because the L ORD has afflicted her For her many transgressions; Her infants have gone into captivity Before the enemy.
Gone from Fair Zion are all That were her glory; Her leaders were like stags That found no pasture; They could only walk feebly Before the pursuer.
All the precious things she had In the days of old Jerusalem recalled In her days of woe and sorrow, When her people fell by enemy hands With none to help her; When enemies looked on and gloated Over her downfall.
Jerusalem has greatly sinned, Therefore she is become a mockery. All who admired her despise her, For they have seen her disgraced; And she can only sigh And shrink back.
Her uncleanness clings to her skirts. She gave no thought to her future; She has sunk appallingly, With none to comfort her.— See, O L ORD, my misery; How the enemy jeers!
The foe has laid hands On everything dear to her. She has seen her Sanctuary Invaded by nations Which You have denied admission Into Your community.
All her inhabitants sigh As they search for bread; They have bartered their treasures for food, To keep themselves alive.— See, O L ORD, and behold, c Or (ironically) “What a glutton”; cf. Prov. 23.20–21. How abject -c I have become!
b Meaning of Heb. uncertain. May it never befall you, -b All who pass along the road— Look about and see: Is there any agony like mine, Which was dealt out to me When the L ORD afflicted me On His day of wrath?
From above He sent a fire Down into my bones. He spread a net for my feet, He hurled me backward; He has left me forlorn, In constant misery.
d Meaning of parts of vv. 14 and 15 uncertain. The yoke of my offenses is bound fast, Lashed tight by His hand; Imposed upon my neck, It saps my strength; The Lord has delivered me into the hands Of those I cannot withstand.

The Lord in my midst has rejected All my heroes; He has proclaimed a set time against me To crush my young men. As in a press the Lord has trodden Fair Maiden Judah.
For these things do I weep, My eyes flow with tears: Far from me is any comforter Who might revive my spirit; My children are forlorn, For the foe has prevailed.
Zion spreads out her hands, She has no one to comfort her; The L ORD has summoned against Jacob His enemies all about him; Jerusalem has become among them A thing unclean.
The L ORD is in the right, For I have disobeyed Him. Hear, all you peoples, And behold my agony: My maidens and my youths Have gone into captivity!
I cried out to my friends, But they played me false. My priests and my elders Have perished in the city As they searched for food To keep themselves alive.
See, O L ORD, the distress I am in! My heart is in anguish, e Lit. "My heart has turned over within me"; cf. Exod. 14.5; Hos. 11.8. I know how wrong I was -e To disobey. Outside the sword deals death; Indoors, the plague.
When they heard how I was sighing, There was none to comfort me; All my foes heard of my plight and exulted. For it is Your doing: f Emendation yields "Oh, bring on them what befell me, / And let them become like me!" You have brought on the day that You threatened. Oh, let them become like me! -f
Let all their wrongdoing come before You, And deal with them As You have dealt with me For all my transgressions. For my sighs are many, And my heart is sick.

Chapter 2

Alas! The Lord in His wrath Has shamed a Meaning of Heb. uncertain. Fair Zion, Has cast down from heaven to earth The majesty of Israel. He did not remember His Footstool b I.e., the Temple. On His day of wrath.
The Lord has laid waste without pity All the habitations of Jacob; He has razed in His anger Fair Judah's strongholds. He has brought low in dishonor The kingdom and its leaders.
In blazing anger He has cut down All the might of Israel; He has withdrawn His right hand In the presence of the foe; He has ravaged Jacob like flaming fire, Consuming on all sides.
He bent His bow like an enemy, Poised His right hand like a foe; He slew all who delighted the eye. He poured out His wrath like fire In the Tent of Fair Zion.
The Lord has acted like a foe, He has laid waste Israel, Laid waste all her citadels, Destroyed her strongholds. He has increased within Fair Judah Mourning and moaning.
He has stripped His Booth b I.e., the Temple. like a garden, He has destroyed His Tabernacle; c Lit. "(Tent of) Meeting." The L ORD has ended in Zion Festival and sabbath; In His raging anger He has spurned King and priest.
The Lord has rejected His altar, Disdained His Sanctuary. He has handed over to the foe The walls of its citadels; They raised a shout in the House of the L ORD As on a festival day.
The L ORD resolved to destroy The wall of Fair Zion; d I.e., He made His plans. He measured with a line, -d refrained not From bringing destruction. He has made wall and rampart to mourn, Together they languish.
Her gates have sunk into the ground, He has smashed her bars to bits; Her king and her leaders are e Lit. "among the nations." in exile, -e Instruction f Heb. torah, here priestly instruction; cf. Jer. 18.18; Hag.

2.11; Mal. 2.6. is no more; Her prophets, too, receive No vision from the L ORD.
Silent sit on the ground The elders of Fair Zion; They have strewn dust on their heads And girded themselves with sackcloth; The maidens of Jerusalem have bowed Their heads to the ground.
My eyes are spent with tears, My heart is in tumult, g Lit. "My liver spills on the ground." My being melts away -g Over the ruin of h Lit. "the daughter of my people"; so elsewhere in poetry. my poor people, -h As babes and sucklings languish In the squares of the city.
They keep asking their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" As they languish like battle-wounded In the squares of the town, As their life runs out In their mothers' bosoms.
What can I i Emendation yields "compare." take as witness -i or liken To you, O Fair Jerusalem? What can I match with you to console you, O Fair Maiden Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea: Who can heal you?
Your seers prophesied to you Delusion and folly. They did not expose your iniquity So as to restore your fortunes, But prophesied to you oracles Of delusion and deception.
All who pass your way Clap their hands at you; They hiss and wag their head At Fair Jerusalem: j These gestures were intended to ward off the calamity from the viewer; cf., e.g., Jer. 18.16 and note; Job 27.23. "Is this the city that was called Perfect in Beauty, Joy of All the Earth?"
All your enemies Jeer at you; They hiss and gnash their teeth, And cry: "We've ruined her! Ah, this is the day we hoped for; k Lit. "We have attained, we have seen." We have lived to see it!" -k
The L ORD has done what He purposed, Has carried out the decree That He ordained long ago; He has torn down without pity. He has let the foe rejoice over you, Has exalted the might of your enemies.
l Emendation yields "Cry aloud." Their heart cried out -l to the Lord. O wall of Fair Zion, Shed tears like a torrent Day and night! Give yourself no respite, Your eyes no rest.
Arise, cry out in the night At the beginning of the watches, Pour out your heart like water In the presence of the Lord! Lift up your hands to Him For the life of your infants, Who faint for hunger At every street corner.
See, O L ORD, and behold, To whom You have done this! Alas, women eat their own fruit, Their new-born m The root has this meaning in Arabic; others "dandled." babes! Alas, priest and prophet are slain In the Sanctuary of the Lord!
Prostrate in the streets lie Both young and old. My maidens and youths Are fallen by the sword; You slew them on Your day of wrath, You slaughtered without pity.
You summoned, as on a festival, My neighbors from round about. On the day of the wrath of the L ORD, None survived or escaped; Those whom I bore m The root has this meaning in Arabic; others "dandled." and reared My foe has consumed.

Chapter 3

I am the man a Emendation yields "whom the Lord has shepherded with." who has known affliction Under -a the rod of His wrath;
Me He drove on and on In unrelieved darkness;
On none but me He brings down His hand Again and again, without cease.
He has worn away my flesh and skin; He has shattered my bones.
All around me He has built Misery b Taking rosh as equivalent to resh. and hardship;
He has made me dwell in darkness, Like those long dead.
He has walled me in and I cannot break out; He has weighed me down with chains.
And when I cry and plead, He shuts out my prayer;

He has walled in my ways with hewn blocks, He has made my paths a maze.
He is a lurking bear to me, A lion in hiding;
c Meaning of Heb. uncertain. He has forced me off my way -c and mangled me, He has left me numb.
He has bent His bow and made me The target of His arrows:
He has shot into my vitals The shafts of His quiver.
I have become a laughingstock to all people, The butt of their gibes all day long.
He has filled me with bitterness, Sated me with wormwood.
He has broken my teeth on gravel, Has ground me into the dust.
My life was bereft of peace, I forgot what happiness was.
I thought my strength and hope Had perished before the L ORD.
To recall my distress and my misery Was wormwood and poison;
Whenever I thought of them, I was bowed low.
But this do I call to mind, Therefore I have hope:
The kindness of the L ORD has not ended, His mercies are not spent.
They are renewed every morning— Ample is Your grace!
"The L ORD is my portion," I say with full heart; Therefore will I hope in Him.
The L ORD is good to those who trust in Him, To the one who seeks Him;
It is good to wait patiently Till rescue comes from the L ORD.
It is good for a man, when young, To bear a yoke;
Let him sit alone and be patient, When He has laid it upon him.
Let him put his mouth to the dust— There may yet be hope.
Let him offer his cheek to the smiter; Let him be surfeited with mockery.
For the Lord does not Reject forever,
But first afflicts, then pardons In His abundant kindness.
For He does not willfully bring grief Or affliction to man,
Crushing under His feet All the prisoners of the earth.
To deny a man his rights In the presence of the Most High,
To wrong a man in his cause— This the Lord does not choose.
Whose decree was ever fulfilled, Unless the Lord willed it?
Is it not at the word of the Most High, That weal and woe befall?
Of what shall a living man complain? Each one of his own sins!
Let us search and examine our ways, And turn back to the L ORD ;
Let us lift up our hearts with d Lit. "to"; emendation yields "rather than"; cf. Joel 2.13. our hands To God in heaven:
We have transgressed and rebelled, And You have not forgiven.
You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us, You have slain without pity.
You have screened Yourself off with a cloud, That no prayer may pass through.
You have made us filth and refuse In the midst of the peoples.
All our enemies loudly Rail against us.
Panic and pitfall are our lot, Death and destruction.
My eyes shed streams of water Over the ruin of my poor e Lit. "the daughter of my"; so frequently in poetry. people.
My eyes shall flow without cease, Without respite,
f Emendation yields: 50"Until the Lord looks down from heaven/ And beholds 51my affliction. / The Lord has brought me grief." Until the L ORD looks down And beholds from heaven.
My eyes have brought me grief -f Over all the maidens of my city.
My foes have snared me like a bird, Without any cause.
They have ended my life in a pit And cast stones at me.
Waters flowed over my head; I said: I am lost!
I have called on Your name, O L ORD, From the depths of the Pit.
Hear my plea; Do not shut Your ear To my groan, to my cry!
You have ever drawn nigh when I called You; You have said, "Do not fear!"
You championed my cause, O Lord, You have redeemed my life.
You have seen, O L ORD, the wrong done me; Oh, vindicate my right!

You have seen all their malice, All their designs against me;
You have heard, O L ORD, their taunts, All their designs against me,
The mouthings and pratings of my adversaries Against me all day long.
See how, at their ease or at work, I am the butt of their gibes.
Give them, O L ORD, their deserts According to their deeds.
Give them anguish c Meaning of Heb. uncertain. of heart; Your curse be upon them!
Oh, pursue them in wrath and destroy them From under the heavens of the L ORD!

Chapter 4

Alas! The gold is dulled, a Meaning of Heb. uncertain. Debased the finest gold! The sacred b Emendation yields “precious.” gems are spilled At every street corner.
The precious children of Zion; Once valued as gold— Alas, they are accounted as earthen pots, Work of a potter’s hands!
Even jackals offer the breast And suckle their young; But my poor people has turned cruel, Like ostriches of the desert.
The tongue of the suckling cleaves To its palate for thirst. Little children beg for bread; None gives them a morsel.
Those who feasted on dainties Lie famished in the streets; Those who were reared in purple Have embraced refuse heaps.
The guilt c I.e., punishment. of my poor d See note at 3.48. people Exceeded the iniquity -c of Sodom, Which was overthrown in a moment, Without a hand striking it.
Her elect were purer than snow, Whiter than milk; Their limbs were ruddier than coral, Their bodies a Meaning of Heb. uncertain. were like sapphire.
Now their faces are blacker than soot, They are not recognized in the streets; Their skin has shriveled on their bones, It has become dry as wood.
Better off were the slain of the sword Than those slain by famine, a Meaning of Heb. uncertain. Who pined away, [as though] wounded, For lack of -a the fruits of the field.
With their own hands, tenderhearted women Have cooked their children; Such became their fare, In the disaster of my poor d See note at 3.48. people.
The L ORD vented all His fury, Poured out His blazing wrath; He kindled a fire in Zion Which consumed its foundations.
The kings of the earth did not believe, Nor any of the inhabitants of the world, That foe or adversary could enter The gates of Jerusalem.
It was for the sins of her prophets, The iniquities of her priests, Who had shed in her midst The blood of the just.
They wandered blindly through the streets, Defiled with blood, So that no one was able To touch their garments.
“Away! Unclean!” people shouted at them, “Away! Away! Touch not!” So they wandered and wandered again; For the nations had resolved: “They shall stay here no longer.”
e Meaning of line uncertain. The L ORD ’s countenance has turned away from them, He will look on them no more. They showed no regard for priests, No favor to elders.
Even now our eyes pine away In vain for deliverance. As we waited, still we wait For a nation that cannot help.
Our steps were checked, We could not walk f Or “With long strides.” in our squares. -f Our doom is near, our days are done— Alas, our doom has come!
Our pursuers were swifter Than the eagles in the sky; They chased us in the mountains, Lay in wait for us in the wilderness.

The breath of our life, the L ORD ’s anointed, Was captured in their traps— He in whose shade we had thought To live among the nations.
Rejoice and exult, Fair Edom, Who dwell in the land of Uz! To you, too, the cup shall pass, You shall get drunk and expose your nakedness.
Your iniquity, Fair Zion, is expiated; He will exile you no longer. Your iniquity, Fair Edom, He will note; He will uncover your sins.

Chapter 5

Remember, O L ORD, what has befallen us; Behold, and see our disgrace!
Our heritage has passed to aliens, Our homes to strangers.
We have become orphans, fatherless; Our mothers are like widows.
We must pay to drink our own water, Obtain our own kindling at a price.
We are hotly a Lit. “on our neck”; meaning of Heb. uncertain. pursued; Exhausted, we are given no rest.
We hold out a hand to Egypt; To Assyria, for our fill of bread.
Our fathers sinned and are no more; And we must bear their guilt.
Slaves are ruling over us, With none to rescue us from them.
We get our bread at the peril of our lives, Because of the b Or “heat (cf. Deut. 28.22) of the wilderness”; meaning of Heb. uncertain. sword of the wilderness. -b
Our skin glows like an oven, With the fever of famine.
They c I.e., the slaves of v. 8. have ravished women in Zion, Maidens in the towns of Judah.
Princes have been hanged by them; c I.e., the slaves of v. 8. No respect has been shown to elders.
Young men must carry millstones, And youths stagger under loads of wood.
The old men are gone from the gate, The young men from their music.
Gone is the joy of our hearts; Our dancing is turned into mourning.
The crown has fallen from our head; Woe to us that we have sinned!
Because of this our hearts are sick, Because of these our eyes are dimmed:
Because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate; Jackals prowl over it.
But You, O L ORD, are enthroned forever, Your throne endures through the ages.
Why have You forgotten us utterly, Forsaken us for all time?
Take us back, O L ORD, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!
For truly, You have rejected us, Bitterly raged against us. Take us back, O L ORD, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!